

## **Clothing Guidelines**

### **For**

## **US Women and Children**

This clothing guideline is for use during the annual Battle of New Orleans Celebration at the Chalmette Battlefield. Please use the guidelines to assist you in putting together a wardrobe for your impression and that of your family. Included are several pattern suggestions, fabric sites, and where to buy footwear. This clothing guideline is compiled by knowledgeable individuals associated with the War of 1812.

In the years, following the ratification of the Constitution, American society did not have aristocrats as in a Jane Austen novel. We had citizens -- members of a fluid society. Their prosperity could take them up and down the social scale. Social status for women often was tied to husbands' occupations. For our event purposes, our social classes were as follows:

- Enslaved men and women and indentured servants
- Working class: free men of color; common laborers; common soldiers; day laborers, ship workers, small scale farmers or tenant farmers, teamsters -- to name a few.
- Middling class: the wives of military officers (the exception here would be militia landowners who may well fall into the Upper Class), trading house factors, some Indian Agents, businessmen, merchant ship captains, government officials, farmers, and the like.
- Upper class: shipping company owners, merchants, bankers, and so on.

Additionally, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, how an American female carried herself in society indicated her social status as well. This carriage included deportment and posture, clothing, and most importantly, proper undergarments including stays. Stays kept the shoulders back, the bosom up, and reined in the form to keep the silhouette smooth, particularly under lightweight cotton gowns.

Lower classes still could aim for a fashionable shape by purchasing used clothing and undergarments at second hand shops and estate auctions. Middling and Upper class women bought their clothing from Mantua Makers in towns and cities. Port cities had the most access to fashionable fabrics and the best mantua and stay makers where cotton imports were often cheaper than linen. Women at military sites could often "shop" at the garrison sutler or the Trade Factory for fabrics as well, esp. if she was a washerwoman or hospital matron.

From about 1800 to 1815, washerwomen is the most commonly used term for women who did laundry for the military. The term laundress is used more after 1815. The duties of the washerwoman were to mend and wash the clothing of the soldiers and most officers. Sometimes she was called upon to make shirts and handkerchiefs, tailor clothing, and mark clothing (not to be confused with embroidery). Another occupation for women in the confines of the U.S. military was to be assigned a Hospital Matron. This term should not be confused with nursing care as we now know it. The hospital matron was not a nurse. She had the job of cleaning up the spoiled linens of sick or injured soldiers and washing their clothes among other duties.

As to children, if out of diapers or breeched, they would have dressed much like the adults around them. Our modern concept of childhood did not exist. Their clothing reflects the adults around them to a degree. One exception would be middling to upper class boys in skeleton suits; otherwise, they wore pantaloons, shirts, cravats, vests, and jackets or roundabouts, much like their fathers. (See further below for pattern sources for children's clothing.)

The following guide is to help you make the most out of your chosen impression for the event.

### **I. Lower classes:**

- Under-garments
  - Chemise/shift in natural linen at calf length.
  - Stay
  - "Under" petticoat in natural linen
  - Stockings
  - Wool Tape garters
  - Neckerchief to fill in neckline of dress or short gown. Bosom and neckline should be covered during the day. Usually a large square of fine linen or cotton (could be a homespun check or print), folded in half.
- Dress
  - Simple dress, front opening suggested, in solid color linen, fustian (linen/cotton blend), cotton print with no more than one other color, light –weight wool.
  - High waist "outer" petticoat and high waist short gown, can be of same print pattern to create on "one piece" look or print pattern short gown or solid or check (homespun plaids). Petticoat can also be solid or stripes. Linen, cotton, lightweight wool.
- Over-garments
  - Cloak – short or long
  - Shawl – solid wool or plaid (no more than two colors).
  - "Cast-off" military roundabout. Blue wool.
- Accessories
  - Day cap –do not confuse with Revolutionary War mop caps!
  - Bonnet – linen, silk, or wool. Avoid feathers and frilly ribbons.
  - Hat - Straw or wool felt. Keep plain.
  - Head wrap – Creole-style
  - Pocket(s) – use as you would a purse or wallet, worn under dress with slits to access them.
  - Workbag – to keep knitting or sewing projects. Usually 10 x 18 inches with a simple casing or drawstring.
  - Mitts – natural linen.
  - Apron – wool if cooking; natural linen or cotton check/plaid otherwise. See *Rural Pennsylvania Clothing*, p. 57-63, for a quick and simple apron. Worn under the bust (not at natural waist).
  - Shoes – low quarter/heel, pointed toe, ties together. Jefferson bootees.

### **Activities to engage in if Lower Class:**

- Knitting
- Marking clothing, that is, to put initials on them.
- Wash clothes (need a wash tub, soap ball, and place to hang wash).
- Sewing.
- Cooking – keep modern items at home. Use period containers and equipment (exception – coolers).

### *Activities to avoid if Lower Class:*

- Crochet or Tatting, didn't exist yet
- Embroidery and tambour work since these were needle arts that middling and upper class women had learned in female academies.

### **II. Middling to Upper Class:**

- Under-garments
  - Chemise/shift in white cotton or linen at calf length.
  - Stay
  - "Under" petticoat in white linen or cotton
  - Stockings
  - Fancy silk garters
  - Chemisette or Fichu to fill in neckline of dress or short gown. Bosom and neckline should be covered during the day. Usually light weight cotton, could be embroidered.
- Dress
  - Back closing gown – either by two drawstrings or laced.
  - Bibb or apron front gown (front closing).
  - High waist petticoat with over gown or jacket.
  - Riding habit
  - Walking costume
  - Morning clothes – white cotton muslin or short jacket with high waist outer petticoat.
- Over-garments
  - Spencer –corduroy, silk, or wool
  - Pelisse
  - Redingote
  - Shawls – embroidered cotton, net/tulle with embroidery, silk, or wool, esp. paisley design.
- Accessories
  - Day cap – frilly, net/tulle, fine cotton, embellished with embroidery, silk ribbons.
  - Bonnet –Silk, linen, wool, with feathers and frilly ribbons, sometimes lace.
  - Bonnet veil.
  - Straw hat.
  - Turbans
  - Toques
  - Helmets
  - Parasol – silk or waxed or oiled linen cover.
  - Reticule
  - Workbag – to keep embroidery, knitting, or small sewing projects. Usually 10 x 18 inches with a simple casing or drawstring. Silk.
  - Apron – show apron – embroidered fine lt. cotton. Black silk aprons were also popular.
  - Fan.
  - Mitts and gloves.
  - Tippet
  - Muff
  - Shoes – low heeled, pointed toe may have ties. Bootees. Slippers with ribbons. Slippers were rarely worn on the street. Usually worn in the home or ballroom.

### Activities to do if Middling or Upper Class:

- Embroidery and/or Tambour work, esp. on a frame
- Knitting, esp. lace
- Sewing
- Read a book
- Sketching or Watercolor painting
- Write letters or keep a journal/portfolio
- Take tea
- Promenade

**Where to buy things, from patterns to shoes, form fabrics, to notions:** some local quilt shops have early prints available. Just be very careful! You might want to consult *Wearable Prints, 1760-1860* by Susan W. Greene.

**Promenade Fabrics:** <http://www.promenadefabrics.com> NOLA fabric store located on St. Charles Ave. Wide assortment of period correct fabrics. Very helpful.

**Past Patterns:** <http://www.pastpatterns.com/1789.html> Especially see #031 (dress is spot on for this era) and 038 (stay – front opening) and for U.S. military women, roundabout jacket #041, make out of in dark blue wool.

**Kannik's Korner:** <http://www.kanniskorner.com/home.htm> Particularly see patterns for day caps, bonnets, chemise, short cloak, pocket patterns for women, and children's clothing.

**Burnley and Trowbridge:** <http://www.burnleyandtrowbridge.com> Especially see in patterns the 1805 short gown, 1809 back closing dress, Period Impressions Bibb Front dress, and Spencer pattern; shoes; fabrics.

**Spencer's Mercantile:** <http://www.spencersmercantile.com> See a variety of Country Wives patterns, including a combination front opening dress pattern that comes with a chemise pattern.

**Wm. Booth Draper:** <http://www.wmboothdraper.com/> Fig Leaf Work Dress, c. 1795; silk ribbons; fabrics, and a lot more.

**Regency Revisited:** <http://www.regencyrevisited.com/> Among their stock -- fabrics, patterns, sewing tools, silk ribbons. Try to visit them this summer at an event to see what they have that is not on their website.

**American Duchess:** <http://www.american-duchess.com/shoes-18th-century> Scroll down to last line and you will see bootees and a very low heel slipper. She gives instruction on how to dye and be-ribbon your slippers.

**Linen fabric site:** <http://www.fabrics-store.com/first.php?goto=showarticles&menu=f&article=3> Great source for lightweight linen (3.5 oz) and check the "Doggie Bag" specials for small amounts if you only need a little of this or that for work bags, pockets, children's clothes.